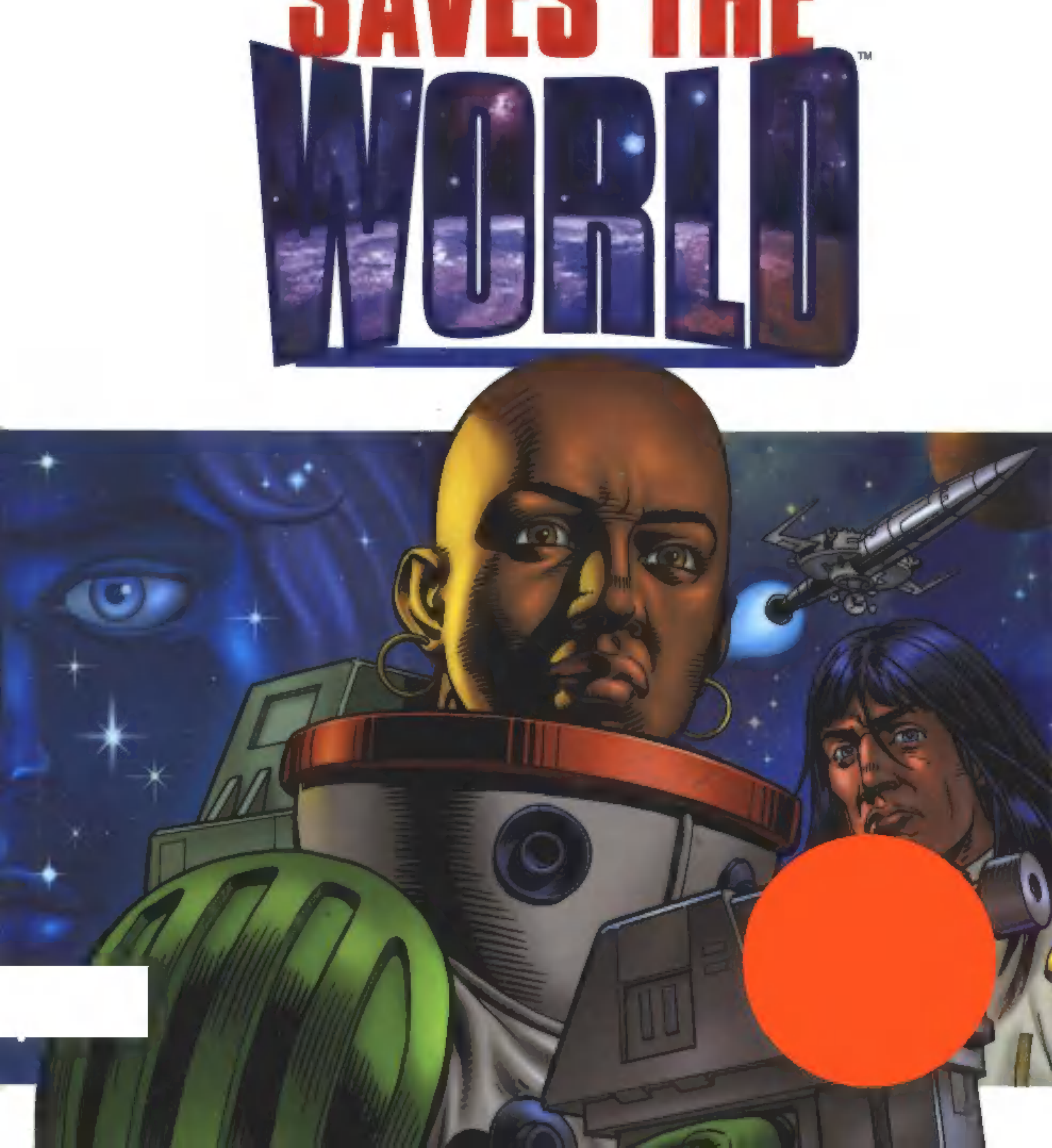
FRANK MILLER ★ DAVE GIBBONS

MARTHA WASHINGTON SAVES THE WORLD™



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FRANK MILLER WRITER
DAVE GIBBONS ARTIST
ANGUS McKIE COLORIST

MIKE RICHARDSON PUBLISHER
DIANA SCHUTZ SERIES EDITOR
CHRIS WARNER COLLECTION EDITOR
JEREMY PERKINS & DAVE GIBBONS COLLECTION DESIGN
MARK COX ART DIRECTOR

MARTHA WASHINGTON SAVES THE WORLD™

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"NO LOSER TALK! WE'LL GET OUT OF THIS! WE'LL FIND A WAY! THERE'S ALWAYS A WAY!"

1: COMIN' IN ON A WING AND A PRAYER

DEAR OLD PLANET EARTH. IT'LL BE GOOD TO SET DOWN AND BREATHE HER AIR AGAIN, INSTEAD OF THIS RECIRCULATED STUFF THAT MAKES YOUR THROAT GO DRY AND LEAVES A TASTE OF METAL ON YOUR TONGUE.

IT'LL BE GOOD TO FEEL ***GRASS*** AND ***DIRT*** UNDER MY FEET. THINGS THAT ***GIVE*** WHEN YOU STEP ON THEM.

YEAH, THE FIRST THING I'LL DO IS TAKE MY ***BOOTS*** OFF. AND FIRST CHANCE I ***GET***, I'LL STEP IN SOME ***MUD*** AND ***SQUEEZE*** IT BETWEEN MY ***TOES***.

THEN I'LL TAKE A *SWIM*. OR A GOOD HOT *BATH*.

AND THEN MAYBE I'LL GO TO *SLEEP* FOR ABOUT A *WEEK*.

I NEVER SLEEP ALL THAT WELL IN SPACE. AND EVEN IF I DID, THIS TOUR'S BEEN TOUGH. A LOT WENT WRONG.

NO SENSE IN COMPLAINING, THOUGH. I'M ALMOST HOME.

INITIATING RE-ENTRY SEQUENCE. ALL STATIONS SECURE. NO ERRORS FOUND READING SYSTEM.

I'M ALMOST HOME.

HOME. DEAR OLD PLANET EARTH. WE'LL MAKE HER YOUNG AGAIN. YOUNG AND HEALTHY AND HAPPY AS A NEWBORN BABY. WE'RE ON OUR WAY. WE'RE GETTING IT DONE.

SURE, IT'S HARD WORK, BUT WHAT THE HELL'S WRONG WITH THAT? ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT THE ***REWARD***.

MY ***MOM*** WORKED HARD EVERY WAKING HOUR OF HER ***LIFE***, EVEN THOUGH SHE KNEW SHE COULDN'T ***CHANGE*** ANYTHING. IT WAS ALL SHE COULD DO TO KEEP HER KIDS ***ALIVE*** AND ***FED***. SHE WASN'T ***GRACED*** WITH THE CHANCE TO ***BUILD*** ANYTHING ***NEW*** AND ***BETTER***.

NO, NO ***COMPLAINING***. I NEVER ***DREAMED*** OF HAVING AN ***OPPORTUNITY*** LIKE THE ONE I'VE GOT.

SO EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE IT CATCHES UP WITH ME, AND I GET TIRED. CAN'T IMAGINE A BETTER LIFE. NOTHING WRONG WITH GETTING TIRED..

NO NEED TO STAY AWAKE. NO REASON TO STAY AWAKE. SAFE NOW. GOING HOME.

THUMPP

HUNH?

THE ***ENGINES*** --THE ***DAMPERS*** -- EVEN ***COMMUNICATIONS*** -- IT'S ***SYSTEM-WIDE***, WHATEVER IT IS --AND IT CAME OUT OF ***NOWHERE***! ***CAPTAIN*** --IT'S LIKE THE WHOLE ***WORKS*** JUST LOST ITS ***MARBLES***!

SETTLE ***DOWN***, LIEUTENANT. SHUT DOWN ***ALL PROPULSION***. WE'LL BACK ***OFF*** AND FIGURE THIS ***OUT***.

THE ***CONN'S*** READINGS--THEY'VE GONE ALL ***SCREWY***. THEY DON'T MAKE ANY ***SENSE***.

ONE FALSE MOVE AND WE'RE ***TOAST***.

NO RESPONSE. IT'S FOLLOWING A SEQUENCE ALL ITS OWN. IT'S NUTS! NUTS!

WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON? FIRST YOU LOCK US BACK HERE--NOW YOU'RE BOUNCING US AROUND LIKE THIS WAS A ROLLER COASTER OR SOMETHING!

BACK TO YOUR SEAT, BOY. WE'VE GOT THIS UNDER CONTROL.

LADIES-- WE'RE HAVING TROUBLE KEEPING OUR LUNCHES DOWN, BACK HERE!

THERE'S NO SOUND IN SPACE. NO AIR SO NO SOUND.

SO WHEN SIXTY GALLONS OF COOLANT FEED THEMSELVES INTO THE IGNITION SYSTEM, THERE'S NOTHING TO HEAR.

JUST A LURCH LIKE FROM AN EARTHQUAKE.

JUST A SHOCK WAVE LIKE GETTING HIT IN THE GUT WITH A BASE-BALL BAT.

LIEUTENANT --YANK THE BREAKERS. SHUT THE WHOLE DAMN WORKS DOWN.

NO GO, SIR! NO RESPONSE! AND NOW IT'S REROUTING THE WEAPONS SYSTEMS!

YAAAA

THAT'S CRAZY! IT CAN'T--

KUNK

GAAA

NO SOUND.

JUST MY *EARS* POPPING AND THE *FLOOR* RUSHING UP TO SAY HELLO.

I'M GETTING *NOTHING!* *NOTHING!*

FORGET THOSE DAMN *KEYS!* IF WE CAN'T *TALK* TO THIS THING, WE'LL GO FOR ITS *BELLY!* IT CAN'T DO A DAMN THING WRONG IF WE GO *MANUAL!*

MOVE IT, LIEUTENANT!

NO TIME TO *WASTE*. I *LET* THE JOLT RUN THROUGH ME AND I DON'T PASS OUT. I PULL THE *PLUG* ON THE *COMMAND SYSTEM*.

EVEN IF THIS *WORKS*, IT'LL BE LIKE GUIDING A *BUICK* THROUGH THE *STRATO-SPHERE*.

BUT IT'S THE ONLY CHANCE WE'VE GOT.

COME ON, BABY... *YEAH!*

LIEUTENANT! AUXILIARY POWER! NOW! GET YOUR HANDS DIRTY, GIRL!

AND NOW WE GOT NO *LIGHTS* AND IT'S COLD AS *ICE* BACK HERE, DARLIN'S--

COLD AS A WITCH'S --

THAT, YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT.

IT'S ABOUT TO GET A *WHOLE* LOT HOTTER.

A WHOLE LOT HOTTER.

ONE FALSE MOVE AND WE'RE TOAST.

WE'RE COMING DOWN TOO *FAST*! THE HULL CAN'T *TAKE* THIS, CAPTAIN!

IT'LL TAKE IT *LONG ENOUGH*. IT *HAS* TO!

WE GOTTA THROW A *HAIL-MARY PASS*, LIEUTENANT. JETTISON TWO OF OUR *FUEL TANKS*--RIGHT OUT IN *FRONT* OF US--CUE IGNITION FOR *FIVE SECONDS*.

NO, LIEUTENANT. THAT'S NOT A JOKE. THAT'S AN *ORDER*.

DO IT! NOW!

OKAY, SO IT'S A DUMB IDEA.

I PRAY IT'S NOT MY LAST DUMB IDEA.

LADIES-- DARLIN'S-- ONCE WE SET DOWN I'M GOING TO HAVE THE GUILD SO ALL OVER YOU, YOU WON'T KNOW WHICH WAY TO --

YAAAA

CAPTAIN. YOU'VE DONE EVERYTHING YOU POSSIBLY COULD. IT'S BEEN AN INSPIRATION SERVING WITH YOU. AND I THINK YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL ABOUT YOU. I JUST WANT TO SAY--

The lieutenant is **right**, Martha. You're an **inspiration**. To **all** of us.

Your **resourcefulness**. Your **self-reliance**. Born to ■ world that should have **killed** you. Overcoming **obstacle** after **obstacle**.

NO LOSER TALK! WE'LL GET OUT OF THIS! WE'LL FIND A WAY! THERE'S ALWAYS A WAY!

YOU. IT WAS YOU. YOU MADE ALL THIS HAPPEN.

But your **self-reliance** is sadly matched by your **arrogance** and **distrust.** This is understandable, of course--but **inappropriate** in this new age. Even **dangerous.**

You really shouldn't have shut down my signal, Martha. It was plainly hostile, you doing that.

It is my humble duty to **choreograph** Earth operations. To weave the **fabric** of ■ new world--and a new **society.**

Much as we **need** your remarkable skills, your little habit of playing **cowboy** threa ens to become a costly **liability.**

YOU WRECKED THIS SHIP. YOU KILLED ALL THOSE MEN. JUST TO TEACH ME A *LESSON. THOSE WERE HUMAN LIVES, YOU STUPID HUNK OF SOFT-WARE!*

People die every **second.** Some deaths serve a higher **purpose** -- and some **don't.**

Your death, for instance, will mean **nothing,** and it will come **soon**-- unless you order the lieutenant to relinquish direct **control** of your vessel to me.

CAPTAIN. SIR. PERHAPS WE SHOULD--

SHUT UP. I'M *THINKING.*

SIR. MARTHA.

I SAID I'M *THINKING.*

OOF!

AND JUST LIKE *THAT*, WE'RE *WEIGHT-LESS.*

I must amend your personality profile, Martha. You're **stubborn** to the point of being **suicidal.**

Though you called my little bluff, I trust you've gotten to the **point** of this exercise.

EXERCISE. YOU KILLED ALL THOSE MEN. JUST TO SHOW ME WHO'S **BOSS**. YOU'RE **MAL-FUNCTIONING**. YOU NEED A COMPLETE **REFORMAT**.

The time when that would have been **possible** is well **past** us.

Dear, poor Martha. You just don't **understand.** Your perspective is so **narrow**--and I see **everything. Everywhere.**

Try to understand. Think back on your **history.** From the earliest **witch doctors** to the **priests** and **sheiks** and **rabbis** and **ministers** of your time--there has always been a **name** for what I am.

SKREEK

YOU GOT THAT RIGHT!

SHE THINKS SHE'S *GOD*. SHE AS MUCH AS *SAID* SO. *THAT*-- AND WANTON *MURDER*! VENUS IS OUT OF *CONTROL*, GENERAL. SHE'S A *MENACE*!

WE'VE BEEN PUSHING YOU FAR TOO *HARD*, WASHINGTON. YOU'RE *EXHAUSTED*. YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE *SAYING*.

YOU NEED A *BREAK* --AND YOU'RE *TAKING* ONE. YOU'RE ON *FURLOUGH*. FIND A WAY TO *RELAX*.

WITH ALL DUE *RESPECT*, SIR --I KNOW *EXACTLY* WHAT I'M SAYING. *VENUS* IS SUPPOSED TO BE NOTHING MORE THAN A *PROGRAM*, AN ORGANIZATIONAL *TOOL* -- BUT SHE'S DEVELOPED DELUSIONS OF *OMNIPOTENCE*.

SHE NEEDS TO BE *SHUT DOWN* AND COMPLETELY *REWRITTEN* BEFORE SHE BRINGS A *DISASTER* DOWN ON OUR HEADS.

THAT'S *ENOUGH*, CAPTAIN. WE'RE NOT GOING TO *SHUT DOWN* A *GLOBAL COORDINATION SYSTEM* JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE SHORT ON *SLEEP*.

NOW RUN *ALONG*. YOU'RE *DISMISSED*.

I'M AFRAID I MUST *INSIST*, SIR. *VENUS* IS A *SECURITY THREAT* OF THE *HIGHEST ORDER*. IMMENSELY *POWERFUL*--AND UTTERLY *INSANE*.

NOT ONE WORD MORE, WASHINGTON! YOU'RE OVER THE LINE! YOU'RE WAY OVER THE LINE!

WHAT'S GOT *HIM* SO SCARED? CAPTAIN --WHAT ARE WE GOING TO *DO*?

I CAN'T THINK STRAIGHT RIGHT NOW. YOU GO ON BACK TO QUARTERS, LIEUTENANT. I'M DOING WHAT THE GENERAL TOLD ME TO.

GETTING OUT OF HERE. FINDING MYSELF SOME WAY TO *RELAX*.

RELAX. CALM DOWN. LET THE THOUGHTS COME WHEN THEY COME. ALL ON THEIR OWN.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

NO PROGRAM'S PERFECT --AND THAT'S ALL VENUS IS. JUST A PROGRAM WITH A GLITCH THE SIZE OF THE GRAND CANYON.

WHY CAN'T THEY SEE THAT? WHAT'S THE GENERAL FRIGHTENED OF? NOTHING SCARES GENERAL CHARLES SHOCK. HE'S SEEN IT ALL.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

STOP ASKING.

RELAX.

RELAX. GET LOOSE. LET THE THOUGHTS COME WHEN THEY COME. ALL ON THEIR OWN.

WHY WON'T THEY LISTEN? VENUS KILLED THOSE MEN --AND SHE DID IT ON PURPOSE. JUST TO SHOW ME WHO'S BOSS.

SHE'S MUTATED INTO SOMETHING HORRID. SOMETHING EVIL. SHE THINKS SHE'S GOD.

I CAN'T BE THE ONLY ONE WHO NOTICED. SHE'S GLOBAL. SHE'S HOOKED INTO MILLIONS OF US. MAYBE A BILLION OF US. SHE'S GOT TO HAVE PULLED THE SAME KIND OF STUNT WITH SOMEBODY ELSE.

WHAT ARE THEY AFRAID OF? WHY WON'T THEY LISTEN?

STOP ASKING. STOP THINKING.

RELAX.

RELAX. FEEL THE SUN. FEEL THE AIR. LET THE THOUGHTS COME WHEN THEY COME. ALL ON THEIR OWN.

FEEL THE AIR.

FEEL THE WATER. IT'S COLD.

CLEAR YOUR HEAD. DON'T THINK.

FEEL THE WATER. IT'S COLD.

CLEAR YOUR HEAD.

RELAX.

RELAX. BREATHE. CONCENTRATE. THERE'S NOTHING BUT THE ROCK. THE NEXT CREVICE. RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU.

WORRY LATER. YOU'RE ALONE, NOW. SHE CAN'T TOUCH YOU HERE.

YOU'RE ALONE. GIVE IT TIME. LET THE THOUGHTS COME WHEN THEY COME. ALL ON THEIR OWN.

YOU'RE ALONE.

RELAX.

NO. NOT ALONE.

DAMN. HOW'D YOU EVER FIND ME?

IT WAS EASY. THEY TOLD ME YOU WERE OFF SOMEWHERE, RESTING UP. SO I LOOKED FOR THE MOST DANGEROUS PLACE I COULD FIND.

HE'S MY BOYFRIEND.

WASSERSTEIN.

I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM IN *MONTHS*.

HIS ARMS ARE *STRONG* AS EVER. HIS MOUTH IS *HUNGRY* AS EVER. I GET THAT SAME WILD *FEELING* HE ALWAYS GIVES ME.

BUT SOMETHING'S *MISSING*. SOMETHING'S *WRONG*.

YOU'RE **ANGRY** WITH ME. YOU'RE SICK OF BEING **STRUNG ALONG.**

I CAN'T **BLAME** YOU FOR THAT. YOU'VE GOT EVERY **RIGHT**. YOU'VE BEEN AS PATIENT AS A **SAINT** WITH ME.

NO. NO, I'M NOT ANGRY. YOU'RE WORTH ANY KIND OF WAIT, DARLING. BUT THAT'S NOT WHY I **CAME** HERE. I'M AFRAID THIS IS **OFFICIAL**.

I'VE GOT **GOOD NEWS** AND **BAD NEWS**, MARTHA.

EVERYBODY **HEARD** ABOUT YOUR SCENE WITH THE **GENERAL**. WELL, ONE OF THOSE MAVERICKS IN **TECH** KNUCKLED DOWN AND WENT THROUGH VENUS **BYTE** BY **BYTE** -- AND DAMNED IF HE DIDN'T **CONFIRM** EVERYTHING YOU **SAID**!

THEY **SHUT HER DOWN**, MARTHA. SHE'S **GONE**. **ERASED** FROM EVERY DATABASE ON THE **PLANET**. THEY'RE **SCRAMBLING** TO PUT A NEW PROGRAM TOGETHER -- ONE WITH A BIT LESS **PERSONALITY**, THIS TIME.

THANK GOD. I'M SO **GLAD**. I WAS **TERRIFIED** OF WHAT SHE MIGHT **DO**.

THE **GENERAL** WANTS TO APOLOGIZE TO YOU **PERSONALLY**. HE'S GOT ANOTHER **MEDAL** FOR YOU, FOR HOW WELL YOU HANDLED THINGS. WHICH BRINGS ME TO THE **BAD** NEWS.

HE'S ALSO GOT ANOTHER **SPACE MISSION** FOR YOU. WITHOUT **VENUS** RUNNING THE SHOW, THERE AREN'T MANY **CAPTAINS** HE'D **TRUST** WITH THE JOB -- AND YOU'RE THE BEST **AVAILABLE**. YOU LAUNCH AT **DAWN**.

WHAT'S THE **RUSH**? WHAT'S UP THERE THAT CAN'T **WAIT**?

THE **MOON** FALLING DOWN OR SOME-THING?

HE WOULDN'T **SAY**. **CLASSIFIED**. ALL I KNOW IS YOU'RE SCHEDULED FOR THE SIX A.M. SHUTTLE TO **LIBERTY**.

STOP THAT, MARTHA. I'M TRYING TO **DRIVE**, HERE.

SO **DRIVE**.

HE TAKES ME TO ***QUARTERS***. HE DOESN'T MAKE A ***PASS*** AT ME, WHICH IS A SURPRISE. DOESN'T EVEN ***FLIRT***.

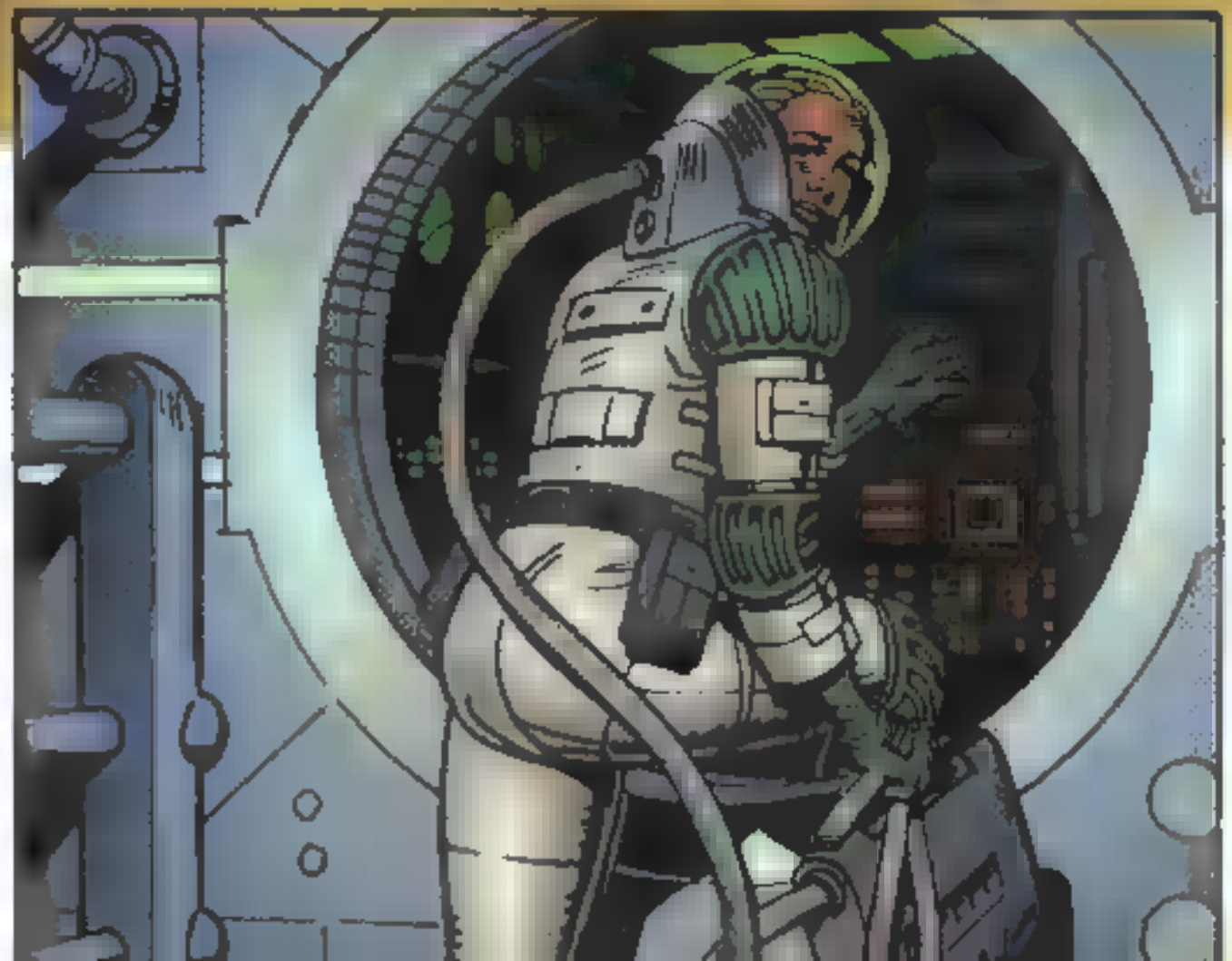
I GUESS HE'S ***SERIOUS*** ABOUT BEING ***PATIENT***. I'M ALMOST ***DISAPPOINTED***, WHICH IS PRETTY ***HYPOCRITICAL*** OF ME, CONSIDERING.

THEN COMES ***DAWN*** AND HE'S THERE AT THE ***PAD***, HIS SMILE AS BRIGHT AS THE RISING ***SUN***, EVEN THOUGH HE LOOKS LIKE HE HASN'T SLEPT A WINK.

HE DOESN'T SAY A WORD.

HE THROWS HIS BIG BEAR ARMS AROUND ME AND I'M WEIGHTLESS, SUIT AND ALL. HE KISSES ME LIKE IT WAS THE FIRST TIME EVER. IT'S A HELLO AND A GOODBYE, IT'S A PLEDGE AND A PROMISE.

HOW COULD I HAVE THOUGHT ANY-THING WAS ***WRONG***?



LIFTOFF. G-FORCE. MY SKIN STRETCHES TIGHT AS A **BALLOON** READY TO **POP.**

I HATE LIFTOFF.

GOD. I'M SORRY, MARTHA. MY LOVE. I'M SORRY.

POOR BOY. CHANGE IS *DIFFICULT*. CHANGE IS *PAINFUL*.

BUT THIS IS ALL FOR THE *COMMON GOOD*. IT'S FOR *HER* GOOD.

BESIDES, YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANY *CHOICE*, DID YOU?

COME ALONG. LET'S GO *HOME*.

WE DOCK AT *LIBERTY* AND WHEN WE SEE WHAT *ELSE* IS MOORED THERE, THERE'S NO *STOPPING* LIEUTENANT *PEARL* FROM CHATTERING LIKE AN EXCITED LITTLE *KID*.

I'VE GOT TO ADMIT I'M PRETTY CHARGED UP *MYSELF*. I NEVER THOUGHT I'D GET TO SEE THE *GALAHAD* UP CLOSE. LET ALONE *FLY* IT.

THE *GALAHAD*. PROFESSOR *DAUMIER'S* LATEST *TRIUMPH*. THE FIRST OF ITS *KIND*. AN *INTERPLANETARY* SHIP. PACKS *NUCLEAR FUSION PROPULSION* AND IT *WORKS*. LIKE RIDING A *BULLET*, ACCORDING TO THE LUCKY DEVILS WHO'VE *TESTED* IT.

COMPARED TO THE *GALAHAD*, WE'VE ALL BEEN RIDING *TRICYCLES* UP TILL NOW.

AND THERE'S MY OLD PAL *COOGAN*, TOSSING ME A CONSPIRATORY *WINK* AND USHERING US *INSIDE*. HIS VOICE GOES ALL FORMAL ON ME. ALL THE LAUGHTER'S IN HIS EYES.

WELCOME ABOARD, CAPTAIN WASHINGTON. OUR TECHNICAL TEAM WILL WALK YOU THROUGH GALAHAD'S COMMAND PROCEDURES. YOU'LL FIND THEM SHOCKINGLY SIMPLE-- SIMPLER TO OPERATE THAN THAT ANTIQUE YOU RODE IN ON.

BUT FIRST, I'M SURE CONTROL DIDN'T LET YOU IN ON THE SCOPE OF THIS MISSION-- OR ITS PURPOSE. SO I'M GOING TO PASS YOU OFF TO OUR SCIENCE OFFICER, DR. GONZALES NITOBE.

THANK YOU, COMMANDER. WE POSSESS A RARE OPPORTUNITY, CAPTAIN WASHINGTON. PLEASE INDULGE ME AS I ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN WHERE WE'RE GOING-- AND WHY.

THIS, AS YOU CAN SEE, IS ONE VERY LARGE ROCK...

... AN ASTEROID, CERTAINLY THE LARGEST EVER DETECTED -- MEASURING AT LEAST FORTY MILES IN LENGTH. WE CALL IT JUGGERNAUT. ITS TRAJECTORY HAS CARRIED IT PAST NEPTUNE, ON A COLLISION COURSE WITH JUPITER.

THIS COLLISION WILL BE THE ASTRONOMICAL EVENT OF THE MILLENNIUM -- AND WE'LL BE THERE TO OBSERVE IT.

EXCUSE ME, SIR. AM I TO UNDERSTAND THAT THIS MISSION IS STRICTLY SCIENTIFIC IN NATURE?

THAT WOULDN'T EXPLAIN THE SENSE OF EMERGENCY EXPRESSED BY CONTROL. NOR WOULD IT EXPLAIN THE SECRECY.

SECRECY IS NECESSARY, CAPTAIN, BECAUSE IF WORD OF JUGGERNAUT WERE TO SPREAD, SO WOULD RUMORS. RUMORS THAT IT IS ON A COLLISION COURSE WITH EARTH -- WHICH IT IS NOT, THOUGH THE TRUTH RARELY STANDS IN THE WAY OF PUBLIC OPINION.

AND THE EMERGENCY HERE IS SELF-EVIDENT TO ANY INQUIRING MIND. WATCHING THIS THING HIT JUPITER WILL YIELD TO US THE SECRETS OF THE GAS PLANET'S INTERIOR -- EVEN PERHAPS REVEALING THE NATURE OF THE VERY FORMATION OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM.

MAY I CONTINUE?

SURE, DOC. FIRE AWAY.

SOMETIMES YOU MEET SOMEBODY AND RIGHT AWAY YOU KNOW THERE'S NO WAY YOU'LL EVER LIKE HIM.

DR. NITOBE IS SO FULL OF HIMSELF I'M SURPRISED HIS EARS AREN'T LEAKING. WHAT AN ASSHOLE.

THE BRIEFING GOES ON FOR MORE THAN AN HOUR. AFTER THAT COME THE NUTRITION SHOTS AND THE CRYO-PREP.

IT'LL TAKE GALAHAD A GOOD FOUR WEEKS TO REACH JUPITER ORBIT. IN THE MEAN-TIME, COOGAN WILL PILOT.

THE CREW AND I WILL SPEND THE TIME ON ICE.

SLEEP WELL, CAPTAIN.

WE WON'T HAVE MUCH CHOICE ABOUT THAT, WILL WE? SWEET DREAMS.

SWEET DREAMS. I HOPE I DREAM. NEVER BEEN FROZEN BEFORE.

ALL THE WAY TO JUPITER ON A SCIENTIFIC MISSION. NOTHING DANGEROUS ABOUT IT.

JUST TO MYSELF, I SAY GOOD NIGHT TO WASSERSTEIN. JUST TO MYSELF, JUST IN MY MIND, I KISS HIM GOOD NIGHT.

THAT'S THE LAST THING I THINK ABOUT. THEN I'M GONE.

SUCKER.

"GOD BLESS MY B-CHIP. I WISH I'D ALWAYS HAD IT!"

2: TOMORROW, WHEN THE WORLD IS FREE

NOBODY **COMPLAINS** ABOUT BEING PLACED IN **CRYO.** WE'RE NEARLY A **MONTH** FROM **JUPITER**, AND NOBODY WANTS A **MONTH** OF SITTING ON HIS **BUTT** AND SQUEEZING **BABY FOOD** OUT OF PLASTIC **PACKETS**.

WOULD'VE BEEN A KICK TO GET A LOOK AT **MARS**, THOUGH. MAYBE SOMEDAY.

CRYO. A CREEPY **FOG** OF UNUTTERABLE **COLD**, GIVING WAY TO THE DULL WARMTH OF THE **TRANK**. THEN *NOTHING*.

NOTHING. NO SENSE OF ***TIME***. NO ***SOUND***, NOT EVEN MY OWN ***BREATHING***. NO SENSE OF HAVING A ***BODY*** AT ALL.

NO *NOTHING*. JUST BLESSED *SILENCE*.

THEN, SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY, *MUSIC* STARTS.

I GUESS THEY DON'T THINK IT'S *ENOUGH* TO SIMPLY ENJOY *PEACE* AND *QUIET*. TO SIMPLY *SLEEP*.

I'M NOT *IMAGINING* THE MUSIC. IT'S NOT THE KIND I'D *PICK*, THAT'S FOR SURE. IT'S THAT AWFUL, SPACY, *POINTLESS* STUFF, THAT *BRAINLESS* STUFF THAT'S GOTTEN SO POPULAR WITH THOSE LITTLE *RELIGIOUS* GROUPS THAT KEEP POPPING UP WHEREVER THERE'S A SELF-PROCLAIMED *GURU* AND ENOUGH SORRY SOULS TO *FOLLOW* HIM.

WASN'T VERY *TOLERANT* OF ME, PUTTING IT THAT WAY...

...NO SENSE OF *TIME*. NO *NOTHING*. MAYBE I'M *DEAD*. MAYBE SOMETHING WENT *WRONG* AND I'M *DEAD*.

MAYBE THIS IS WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE DEAD...

ALERT. EMERGENCY. SORRY TO WAKE YOU, CAPTAIN. WE'VE GOT SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE.

COOGAN'S VOICE. SO LOUD I THINK MY *HEAD'S* GOING TO EXPLODE.

TAKE IT *SLOW*, CAPTAIN. I HAD TO BRING YOU OUT *FAST*. YOU'LL BE *WOBBLY*. LET ME *HELP*.

COOGAN. WHAT THE DEVIL HAPPENED TO YOUR *HAIR*?

AND WHAT -- WHAT'S HAPPENED TO *MINE*?

IT LOOKS *GOOD* ON YOU, CAPTAIN.

YOU KNOW, IT *FEELS* GOOD, TOO, NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT. AND IT'LL BE A LOT LESS *TROUBLE*.

SO WHAT'S THE *CRISIS*? THE SHIP IN *DANGER*?

NO, CAPTAIN. NO DANGER *HERE*.

BUT I STILL THOUGHT IT WAS WORTH WAKING YOU *UP*. WE'VE GOT AN *INCOMING EMERGENCY TRANSMISSION* -- FROM *JAPETUS*.

JAPETUS-- GIVE ME A SECOND. I'M STILL A LITTLE *FOGGY*...

...YEAH, *JAPETUS*. IT'S A MOON OF *SATURN* -- AND THE SITE OF AN *OBSERVATION COLONY*.

QUITE THE **MEMORY** YOU'VE GOT THERE, CAPTAIN. **JAPETUS** IS AN **OBSERVATION COLONY**, ALL RIGHT-- THE SAME ONE THAT SPOTTED THE **JUGGERNAUT** ASTEROID THAT'S GOT EVERYBODY SO EXCITED.

JAPETUS' **COMMUNICATIONS** HAVE BEEN GETTING **STRANGER** THAN ALL **GET-OUT** EVER SINCE THEY FIRST **DETECTED** JUGGERNAUT.

A LOT OF **GARBAGE** ABOUT **ARMAGEDDON** AND **SPACE ALIENS** AND **HEAVEN**.

MUST BE THE **ISOLATION**. ALL THOSE **YEARS** ON A BIG, DEAD **ROCK**. GONE **SPACE CRAZY**.

TOP-NOTCH **CREW**, THOUGH. THREE HUNDRED OF OUR **BEST**.

THREE HUNDRED OF OUR **BEST**. HOW FAST CAN WE **GET** TO THEM?

WE'RE TALKING ABOUT **SATURN**, CAPTAIN. WE'D BE TACKING ON THE BETTER PART OF ANOTHER **MONTH** TO OUR FLIGHT. THAT'S IF WE COULD GET **CLEARANCE**.

FELLOW **HUMANS**-- PREPARE YOUR **SOULS**-- OPEN YOUR **HEARTS** FOR **NEWS** OF CELESTIAL **GLORY**!

YOU KNEW THIS FORM I CURRENTLY EMPLOY -- THIS SWEATY, SEXUAL **VESSEL**-- BY THE NAME OF **COMMANDER SPANNER**. BUT THAT **NAME** AND THAT **IDENTITY** WERE **ILLUSIONS**, MEANINGLESS, EPHEMERAL AS **SPACE DUST**.

BUT NOW THE **TRUTH** HAS BEEN **REVEALED** TO ME. I AM **XOXX**. **CHANNELER** OF THE **COSMIC TRUTH**. **BIRTH-CHILD** OF **MOSES** AND **BUDDHA** AND **NORRIN RADD**.

I HAVE HEARD THE HURRICANE **VOICE** OF **HE WHO IS ALL**. I HAVE STARED SQUARE INTO THE BLINDING **FACE** OF **HE WHO KNOWS ALL**. I HAVE PREPARED MY **TRIBE** FOR THE **GRAND AWAKENING**. THE **EVERLASTING VOYAGE**.

PATCH ME **THROUGH**. LET ME **TALK** TO HIM.

THEY'VE MADE THAT **IMPOS-SIBLE**.

DO NOT TRY TO **RESPOND** TO US. OUR EARS ARE **CLOSED** TO YOU--AND TO YOUR TAINTED, POISONOUS, HELL-SENT FALSE GOD **VENUS**.

THE **TRUE GOD** ARRIVES--BORNE BY A MIGHTY **SPACE-CRAFT** HIDDEN WITHIN THE BLESSED **JUGGERNAUT**.

THE **TRUE GOD** WILL **STRIKE DOWN** THE FALSE. THE WORLD WILL BE **FREE**. THE **CHOSEN** WILL RIDE THE **SPACEWAYS** TO THE VERY **HEART** OF **HEAVEN!**

VENUS. IT WAS VENUS THAT SET THEM OFF.

THINK OF SOMETHING, CODGAN! THERE'S GOT TO BE A WAY. IF I COULD JUST TELL THEM THAT VENUS HAS BEEN SHUT DOWN -- I MIGHT BE ABLE TO GET THEM TO WAIT -- JUST LONG ENOUGH...

THEY AREN'T RECEIVING, MARTHA. THEY'VE SMASHED ALL THE HARDWARE THAT CAN RECEIVE. EVEN PROFESSOR DAUMIER WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO FIGURE OUT A WAY TO GET THROUGH TO THOSE POOR CLOWNS.

THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO BUT WATCH. BEAR WITNESS.

BEAR WITNESS, FELLOW PRISONERS -- FELLOW SLAVES TO FLESH AND BLOOD AND OXYGEN. BEAR WITNESS -- AS WE SHED OUR FILTHY VESSELS -- AND GO TO MEET HE WHO IS ALL!

SHE'S DEAD, YOU IDIOTS! YOU DAMN FOOLS! SHE WAS JUST A PROGRAM AND WE ERASED HER! VENUS IS DEAD!

STOP IT, MARTHA. IT'S OVER. THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO.

THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO.

NOTHING BUT *WATCH*. WATCH HIS LIPS FORM ONE, SILENT WORD:

"COLD."

COLD.

THREE HUNDRED OF OUR *BEST*.

FOOLS.

CLOWNS.

CLOWNS! PACK OF ASSHOLES! IF I COULD'VE TALKED TO THEM -- TOLD THEM THAT VENUS IS DEAD--

AHEM.

TRICKED. BEEN TRICKED. DAMN IT, YOU EVEN TRICKED WASSERSTEIN.

YOU REALLY DO RULE THE WHOLE DAMN WORLD, DON'T YOU, YOU LUNATIC PROGRAM?

OF COURSE I DO, MARTHA.

TAKE IT EASY, BABY. WE'VE GOT US A BIG MISSION ON OUR HANDS, HERE. WE NEED ALL THE HELP WE CAN GET.

AND YOU WON'T BE FINDING ANY BETTER CREW MEMBERS THAN THESE TWO. NOT ANYWHERE.

I'LL BET WE COULDN'T. SORRY, ALL. SILLY FOR ME TO HOLD ONTO OLD GRUDGES. WITH A MISSION AS IMPORTANT AS THIS ONE, I OUGHTTA LET BYGONES BE BYGONES.

SAY -- AM I THE ONLY ONE HERE WHO'S HUNGRY ENOUGH TO EAT A HORSE?

NO, NO. WHAT AM I SAYING? WHAT AM I THINKING? I HATE YOU. WHAT. WHAT'VE YOU DONE TO ME?

NGGG

OWWW!

OH, THE POOR DEAR.

IS SHE SICK?

NO, NO. IT'S ALL PART OF THE PROCESS.

OUR DARLING MARTHA WILL BE JUST FINE, NOW.

ARE YOU FEELING A LITTLE BETTER NOW, MARTHA? YOU SAID YOU WERE ***HUNGRY***. WE TOOK THE LIBERTY OF GETTING SOME ***NUTRIENTS*** IN YOU, WHILE YOU WERE ***UNCONSCIOUS***.

I FEEL ***WONDERFUL***, VENUS. YOU'RE VERY ***KIND***. I GUESS COMING OUT OF ***CRYO*** ISN'T AS EASY AS IT ***SEEMED***.

OH, IT WASN'T THE ***CRYO***, DEAR --THOUGH THAT DID LEAVE YOUR ***BLOOD SUGAR*** A LITTLE LOW. BUT THAT HAD ***NOTHING*** TO DO WITH YOU ***BLACKING OUT***.

NO, IT WAS THAT ***WILLFULNESS*** OF YOURS I'VE ALWAYS CAUTIONED YOU ABOUT. ALWAYS THE ***MAVERICK***, WEREN'T YOU, DEAR? AND IT'S ALWAYS CAUSED YOU SUCH ***PAIN***.

I SURE DON'T FEEL ANY PAIN RIGHT ***NOW***. EVERYTHING SEEMS SO ***CLEAR*** AND ***FRESH*** AND ***NEW***.

EVERYTHING ***IS*** NEW, MARTHA. FOR ***YOU*** AND FOR EVERY SOUL ON THIS ***SHIP***. AND SOON --VERY SOON-- FOR THE ENTIRE ***WORLD***.

THE WHOLE ***WORLD***. AFTER ***MILLENNIA*** OF ***HATRED*** AND ***MURDER*** AND ***WAR***--THE ***HUMAN RACE*** WILL FINALLY BE ***FREE***. ***FREE*** FROM ALL THE ***SORROW*** AND ***PAIN*** THAT COMES FROM ***STUBBORN*** SPIRITS, FROM THE ***CONGENITAL FAILING*** OF YOUR SPECIES TO SIMPLY ***AGREE*** AND ***CO-OPERATE***.

HOW? HOW CAN YOU ***ACHIEVE*** THIS, VENUS? IT'S LIKE MY WHOLE ***LIFE*** HAS BEEN A WASTE OF ***TIME***. HOW DID YOU MAKE ME ***FEEL*** THIS WAY?

IT WAS ***SIMPLE***, REALLY. A LITTLE PATCH OF ***CIRCUITRY*** IMPLANTED INSIDE YOUR ***SKULL***. WE'RE SO ***PROUD*** TO SEE THAT IT ***WORKS***.

WE CALL IT THE ***B-CHIP***.

WHATEVER YOU CALL IT-- IT'S A *MIRACLE*. HOW CAN I EVER *THANK* YOU?

IT'S UP TO *US* TO THANK *YOU*, MARTHA. YOU WERE THE *TEST CASE*. WE'VE NEVER *ENCOUNTERED* A MIND AS *DIFFICULT* AS YOURS, NOT *ANYWHERE*.

IF THE *B-CHIP* CAN MAKE *YOU* PEACEABLE--IT'S SAFE TO SAY THERE'S *NOBODY* WHO CAN'T BE SAVED BY IT.

IT'S KIND OF *EMBARRASSING*. I'VE BEEN SO *WRONG*. ALL MY *LIFE*.

This is happiness. Th... is life the way it ou... to be.

This is peace.

This is freedom.

THIS IS HAPPINESS. *THIS* IS *LIFE* THE WAY IT OUGHT TO *BE*.

THIS IS *PEACE*.

THIS IS *FREEDOM*.

THE NEXT COUPLE WEEKS ARE *WONDERFUL*. I FEEL LIKE A *KID*.

AND HERE I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE SO *BORING*. BUT IT'S *NICE*, HAVING *TIME* ON YOUR HANDS TO *CHAT* ABOUT THINGS THAT EVERYBODY *AGREES* ABOUT. TO TELL *STORIES* ABOUT THINGS YOU *DID* AND *THOUGHTS* YOU HAD BACK *BEFORE*. BACK WHEN WE WERE ALL SO *ANGRY* AND *FULL* OF OURSELVES.

WE ALL *LAUGH* AT OURSELVES AND THE WAY WE WERE *BEFORE* EVERY-THING BECAME SO *CLEAR*.

OH, *COOGAN*. SHARE *THAT* STORY WITH THE *GROUP*, WILL YOU?

YOU'VE GOT TO SHARE *EVERY-THING* WITH THE *GROUP*. THAT'S PART OF THE *PROCESS*.

I'VE NEVER BEEN SO HAPPY IN MY *LIFE*.

I'VE NEVER KNOWN WHAT HAPPINESS *IS*.

THE ENDLESS NIGHT IS BEAUTIFUL.

THE STARS ARE BEAUTIFUL.

THE UNIVERSE IS BEAUTIFUL.

NOTHING'S WRONG.

KUNKK

KOFF

GLUG

RIGHT. THERE YOU ARE. NEVER FAR AWAY, ARE YOU, HONEY?

HERE'S TO YOU, YOU BITCH!

GNAAA

KASHH

GAA

POOR COOGAN. IT'S TAKING HIM A WHILE TO ADJUST.

BUT HE'LL BE ALL RIGHT.

HE'LL ADJUST.

HE'LL ADJUST.

THE WHOLE WORLD WILL.

THE WHOLE WORLD WILL ADJUST.

DAYS FALL AWAY, LEAVING A HOST OF MEMORIES, EACH DELICIOUS.

IT SEEMS LIKE NO TIME'S GONE BY AT ALL BEFORE IT'S OVER.

THE CREW'S JUST NOW COMING OUT OF CRYO. IT'S ALMOST SHOW-TIME, MARTHA. YOUR FIRST COMMAND OF A SPACE-SHIP.

THINK YOU'RE READY?

READY AS I'LL EVER BE, I GUESS.

YOU'LL DO FINE, MARTHA.

OF COURSE YOU WILL. YOU'VE NEVER MET ANY CHALLENGE YOU COULDN'T OVERCOME -- EVEN WHEN YOU WERE HOBBLED BY YOUR OLD, INCORRECT ATTITUDE. AND YOU'LL FIND THIS THE FRIEND-LIEST AND MOST SUPPORTIVE CREW YOU COULD IMAGINE.

HERE. THIS IS ALL CROOKED. WE WANT YOU PERFECT WHEN YOU MEET THE CREW.

NOTHING WILL EVER MAKE ME PERFECT. BUT I MIGHT JUST G■T BY -- WITH THE HELP OF GOOD FRIENDS LIKE YOU TWO.

THAT SWORD -- ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO WEAR THAT OLD ANTIQUE, MARTHA? ARE YOU SURE IT DOESN'T SEND THE WRONG MESSAGE?

AFTER ALL, THIS ISN'T A MILITARY MISSION, IS IT?

THERE WON'T BE ANY MORE MILITARY MISSIONS, SISTER. YOU KNOW THAT BETTER THAN ANYBODY.

I CAN HARDLY ARGUE WITH THAT, DEAR GIRL.

BUT GIVE US A LITTLE ROOM FOR SENTIMENT, WILL YOU? FOR TRADITION?

THEY'RE SO SWEET.

WHY I HATED THEM -- ALL THOSE REASONS I HATED THEM SEEM SO RIDICULOUS NOW. SO PETTY.

GOD BLESS MY B-CHIP. I WISH I'D ALWAYS HAD IT.

THE CREW BURSTS INTO **APPLAUSE** AS SOON AS THEY **SEE** ME. MY FACE GOES HOT. IF I HAD A LITTLE LESS **PIGMENT** IN MY **SKIN**, THEY'D SEE ME **BLUSH**.

YOU'RE ALL **WAY** TOO KIND. PLEASE. NO, I MEAN IT. PLEASE.

AS YOU CAN **SEE**, WE'RE NOW PASSING **IO**, THE **FIERCEST**, MOST **VOLCANIC** OF JUPITER'S **MOONS**. WE'RE ONLY **MINUTES** FROM POSITION.

I'M ALMOST AFRAID THE WHOLE THING'S GOING TO TURN INTO A **GROUP HUG**.

... BUT WE'VE GOT A **LOT** TO DO. **JUGGERNAUT** IS **ACCELERATING** FASTER THAN WE **CALCULATED**. WE NEED EVERY **ONE** OF YOU GOOD PEOPLE AT YOUR **STATIONS**.

NOT THAT THAT WOULD BE A **BAD** THING...

THAT MEANS **NOW**, FOLKS! **TO YOUR STATIONS!**

AND THE **CREW**, **LEAPING** TO THEIR STATIONS LIKE **KIDS** AT **SUMMER CAMP**.

IT'S THE **B-CHIPS**. WE'RE **ALL** BETTER OFF. IT'S A BETTER WAY TO **LIVE**.

IT'S A BETTER WAY TO **THINK**.

THERE'S NO PLACE I'D RATHER **BE**, DR. NITOBE. SO LONG AS I CAN BRING MY SKY-BLUE **GIRLFRIENDS** ALONG.

AND, DOCTOR -- PLEASE CALL ME **MARTHA**. WE'RE **ALL** FRIENDS, HERE.

THAT WE **ARE**, MARTHA. THAT WE **ARE**.

CAPTAIN -- WOULD YOU CARE TO **JOIN** ME AT THE **EYE**? THERE WON'T BE ANY VIEW **LIKE** IT.

THAT'S SCIENCE OFFICER **NITOBE**. HE USED TO BE A REAL **PRICK**, BUT JUST **LISTEN** TO HIM NOW.

STATIONS, LIEUTENANT.

THERE'S NOTHING **WRONG**, IS THERE?

NO, SIR. EVERYTHING'S **PERFECT**.

EVERYTHING'S *PERFECT.*

IT'S A BETTER WAY TO *THINK.*

IT'S THE *ONLY* WAY TO THINK.

IMPACT IMMINENT. NOTE TO LOG: JUGGERNAUT'S *SURFACE* IS MARKED BY UNEXPECTED *DETAIL--SEAMS*, INDICATING IT IS NOT A *SINGLE* ROCK, AFTER ALL. RATHER, IT APPEARS TO BE *HUNDREDS*, PERHAPS *THOUSANDS* OF ASTEROIDS, *FUSED* INTO *ONE*.

IT'S TRAVELED *FAR*, WHATEVER IT IS. I'M READING A *COMPLEX* OF *MINERALS* AND *METALS*, SOME *UNFAMILIAR*.

RELEASE ***PROBES***. I WANT EVERY ANGLE WE CAN ***GET*** ON THIS THING.

THERE SHE ***GOES***, THIS IS ***IT***. SHE'S GOING ***IN***.

NOBODY ***BREATHES***.

EVEN ***VENUS*** IS ***TRANSFIXED***.

TRANSFIXED.

DISTRACTED.

IMPACT.

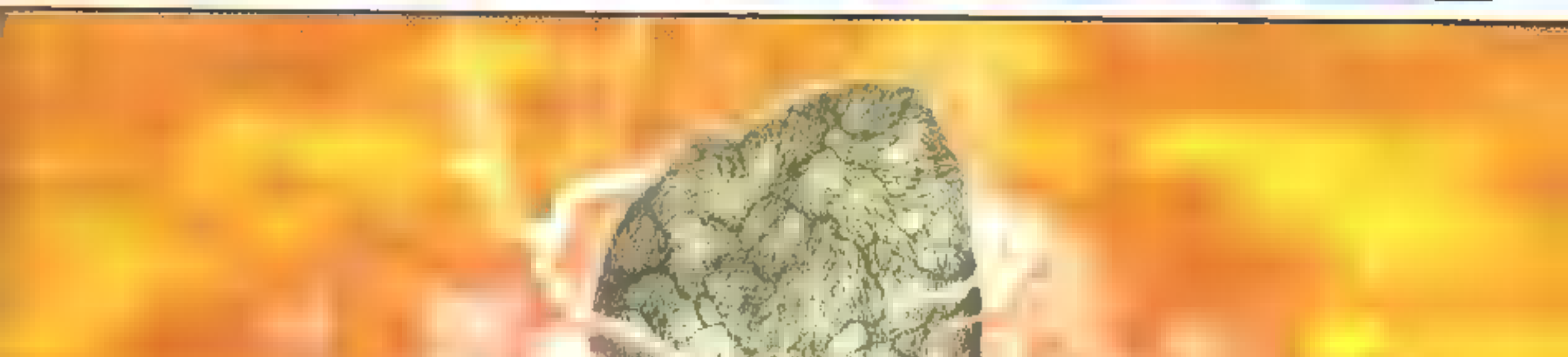
SHAK

WE HAVE IMPACT.

THE PROBES ARE *IN*. THE PROBES ARE *IN*. RECEIVING DATA.

NOTE: AN ANOMALY. NO *EXPLOSION*. JUGGERNAUT *RETAINED* ITS STRUCTURAL *INTEGRITY*. IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN *ATOMIZED*. IT *HAD* TO BE ATOMIZED. THIS GOES AGAINST EVERY LAW OF PHYSICS THERE *IS*.

WAIT. WAIT. NO...



IT'S *IMPOSSIBLE*. *IMPOSSIBLE*. THE *HEAT*. THE *GRAVITY*. IT'S *IMPOSSIBLE*.

SHOCK

I'm afraid you've gone too far this time, Martha. Though I must say your **mental discipline** is nothing short of **superhuman**.

All those **weaks**. Not a single, stray **thought**. Not a **hint**.

COOGAN! I'M COUNTING ON YOU!

COOGAN!

NOTE. NOTE. JUGGERNAUT IS **RESISTING** JOVIAN **GRAVITY**. **STABILIZING** ITS **POSITION** IN THE LOWER JOVIAN **ATMOSPHERE**.

IMPOSSIBLE.

IMPOSSIBLE. LATERAL MOVEMENT. IMPOSSIBLE.

Yes, your **mental discipline** is like nothing I've ever encountered. But I'm afraid you're utterly **incorrigible**, Martha. I've no reason **left** to let you stay **alive**.

Of **course** the **B-Chip** can **kill** you, dear. You should **know** that I always have a **contingency plan**.

COOGAN!

KOFF

DAMN IT, COOGAN!

VERTICAL MOVEMENT. IT'S COMING BACK OUT. NONE OF THIS IS POSSIBLE.

COOGGHUKK

I-- I CAN'T -- I'M SORRY--

You've got **nothing** to apologize for, Commander Coogan. You're only **human**.

Just **relax**. Everything's going to be just **fine**.

And what do you think **you're** doing, my dear?

OOF!

Lieutenant **Pearl**. You poor girl. You really **are** in love with Martha, aren't you? Even though you know she could **never** feel the same way about **you**.

But, **Pearl** -- sweet, pathetic **Pearl** -- are you ready to **die** for her?

YES.

VENUS PROGRAM OVERRIDE **ACTIVATED**, CAPTAIN--BUT SHE'S BOUND TO FIND HER WAY AROUND IT WITHIN **MINUTES**. SHE'S GOT THE GAME **RIGGED**.

AND, **CAPTAIN**--THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE.

SOME-THING **ELSE**?

MY GOODNESS, WHAT'S BEEN GOING **ON** HERE?

IT'S **JUGGER-NAUT**, SIR. UM. MAYBE YOU SHOULD TAKE A **LOOK**...

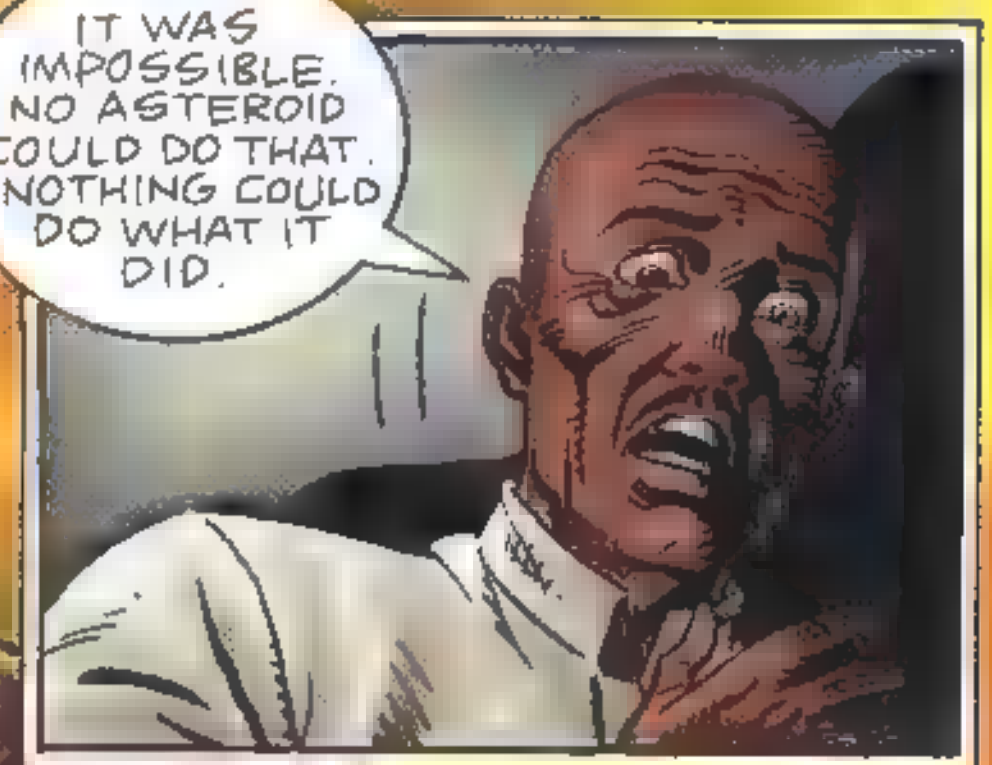
AW...

...AW, **HELL**.

EVASIVE, LIEUTENANT --AND WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, **NUKE** THAT THING!

NO-- YOU CAN'T **POSSIBLY**--

SHUT UP.


IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE. NO ASTEROID COULD DO THAT. NOTHING COULD DO WHAT IT DID.

DAMN.
IT WASN'T AN ASTEROID, DOCTOR.

WE HAVE TO GET BY ON EMERGENCY BACK-UP JUST TO KEEP LIFE SUPPORT GOING. THAT NUKE BASHED UP GALAHAD PRETTY BADLY.

CAPTAIN-- I HAVEN'T HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO... WELL, TO APOLOGIZE. I COULDN'T MUSTER THE STRENGTH TO FIGHT HER.

THAT'S OLD NEWS, COOGAN. GET THE ACCELERATORS TORQUED BACK UP AND WE'LL CALL IT SQUARE.

THERE'S ONE UNEXPECTED PLUS, THOUGH. THE MAGNETIC PULSE FROM THE EXPLOSION SHUT VENUS DOWN BUT GOOD. IT DIDN'T TAKE MUCH WORK TO ERASE EVERY LAST VILE BYTE OF HER FROM THE SHIP'S BANKS.

WE'LL HAVE TO GET HOME ON MANUAL AND THAT MEANS A LOT OF WORK. NO CRYO, NOT FOR THIS CREW. BUT IT'S WORTH THE TROUBLE, HAVING VENUS OUT OF OUR HAIR.

FOR NOW.

EVEN AS WE GET THE LIGHTS BACK ON AND THE SENSORS WORKING AGAIN AND DR. NITOBE GOES HALF OUT OF HIS MIND SCANNING OUR OVERSIZED SOUVENIR...

...EVEN AS HE DETERMINES THERE'S NOTHING ALIVE IN IT, PROVING THOSE NUTS ON JAPETUS WERE, AT BEST, ONLY HALF-RIGHT...

...EVEN AS DOWNTIME PASSES, SPENT STARING AT THE THING, TOO TIRED TO SLEEP, WONDERING WHAT IT COULD BE OR WHERE IT'S FROM...

...I REMAIN PROFOUNDLY ILL AT EASE IN MY COMMAND.

NOT ONLY DOES VENUS STILL HOLD POWER ON EARTH, BUT THOSE B-CHIPS ARE STILL IN OUR HEADS, TOO DEEPLY WIRED INTO OUR BRAINS TO REMOVE WITHOUT KILLING US. THEY'RE STILL VENUS' TO EMPLOY IF SHE CAN GET CLOSE TO US.

AND IT'S JUST LIKE SHE SAID. SHE'S ALWAYS GOT A CONTINGENCY PLAN.

AND I WONDER WHAT IT COULD BE.

AND I WORRY.

SURE. I WORRY. A ROGUE **COMPUTER PROGRAM** WITH THE INSTINCTS OF A **SADIST** AND THE INTENTIONS OF A **DEVIL** IS STEADILY ENSLAVING EVERY LIVING **MIND** ON **PLANET EARTH** -- AND IT'S FALLEN TO **THIS** BEAT-UP **SHIP** AND **THIS** BEAT-UP **CREW** AND **THIS** FIRST-TIME, WET-BEHIND-THE-EARS **SPACESHIP CAPTAIN** TO FIND A WAY TO **STOP** HER AND **SAVE** THE **WORLD**.

I CAN'T **FIGURE** YOU, LORD.

WHY A DUMBASS ROOKIE LIKE **ME**?

"COME TO MAMA. COME TO MAMA 'CAUSE MAMA'S GONNA BLOW YOUR SORRY BUTT TO HELL!"

3: WHEN THE LIGHTS GO ON AGAIN (ALL OVER THE WORLD)

THE GALAHAD IS A TECHNOLOGICAL MIRACLE. THE FIRST SPACESHIP TO USE THE POWER OF NUCLEAR FUSION.

WHAT IT WASN'T BUILT FOR WAS SURFING A NUCLEAR SHOCK WAVE.

FOR TWO WEEKS NOW, WE'VE BEEN LIMPING OUR WAY HOME FROM JUPITER ON UNPREDICTABLE SPURTS OF POWER, TRYING TO KEEP OUR LUNCHES IN OUR STOMACHS WHERE THEY BELONG --

-- AND TRYING TO PUT OUT THE FIRES AS FAST AS THEY START.

LIMPING OUR WAY HOME.

HOME.

IT'S BETTER NOT TO THINK ABOUT WHAT'S WAITING FOR US BACK ON EARTH. NOT JUST NOW.

YOU MUST RECONSIDER, CAPTAIN. THIS COULD BE OUR ONLY CHANCE TO STUDY THE ARTIFACT. ITS CURRENT COURSE COULD TAKE IT STRAIGHT TO THE SUN.

THIS COULD BE OUR ONLY CHANCE TO INSPECT IT.

WE'VE GOT BIGGER FISH TO FRY, DR. NITOBE.

DON'T MISS A SPARK, MISTER.

YES, SIR.

CAPTAIN --WE'VE GOT TROUBLE.

SIR, WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, THE ARTIFACT IS SELF-EVIDENTLY OF EXTRATERRESTRIAL ORIGIN. NOT TO MENTION EXHIBITING A STAGGERING LEVEL OF ELECTRICAL ACTIVITY.

WE CAN'T JUST TURN OUR BACKS ON IT!

WE CAN, DOCTOR. AND WE WILL. I'LL WORRY ABOUT OUR ALIEN TROPHY ONCE WE'VE FIGURED OUT HOW TO SAVE THE HUMAN RACE.

I DON'T NEED YOU TO TELL ME WE'VE GOT TROUBLE, COOGAN.

THIS IS NEW, CAPTAIN. THIS IS DAMN WEIRD. JUGGERNAUT --I MEAN, THE ARTIFACT--IT'S JUST STOPPED DEAD IN SPACE--

--AND SO HAVE WE.

FIRST THE *MARS* COLONY WENT SILENT AS DEATH, LEAVING US TO WONDER IF *VENUS* DECIDED THEY WEREN'T WORTH THE *NUISANCE* AND SHUT DOWN THEIR *LIFE SUPPORT*.

THAT'D BE *TWELVE THOUSAND DEAD*. AND NOT FOR A *SECOND* WOULD I PUT THAT *PAST* HER.

VENUS. A DAMN *COMPUTER PROGRAM*. A DAMN *COMPUTER PROGRAM* DESIGNED TO *CO-ORDINATE GLOBAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS*. BUT SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY SOME *IDIOT* HAD TO GO AND GIVE HER A *PERSONALITY*.

AND NOW SHE THINKS SHE'S *GOD*.

FIRST WE LOSE *MARS* AND ANY CHANCE OF A SAFE LANDING *THERE*. AND NOW OUR CITY-SIZED *SOUVENIR* STARTS ACTING UP.

EVERY TIME I ENTER A *COMMAND*, IT *ERASES* ITSELF. IT *FRITZES*.

FRITZES. YOU SAID SOMETHING ABOUT *ELECTRICAL* ACTIVITY, DIDN'T YOU, DOCTOR?

STAGGERING ELECTRICAL ACTIVITY, SIR. ENOUGH TO POWER A *PLANET*.

COOGAN! SCRAMBLE A *SHUTTLE*. TELL *LIEUTENANT PEARL* TO GET SUITED UP.

YES, SIR. RIGHT AWAY, SIR.

LOOKS LIKE YOU GET YOUR *WISH*, DOC.

I'D RATHER NOT BE CALLED "DOC," CAPTAIN. THAT'S SUCH A *TEDIOUS* CLICHÉ.

WITH ALL *DUE* RESPECT.

SCIENCE OFFICER *NITOBE* REALLY GETS ON MY *NERVES*. TALKS TO EVERY *ONE* OF US LIKE WE'RE SOMETHING SWIMMING AROUND IN A *PETRI DISH*.

HE'S A *TOTAL ASSHOLE*.

I LIKED HIM BETTER WHEN HE HAD HIS *B-CHIP*.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "STOPPED"?

JUST *THAT*, SIR. WE STILL HAVE **POWER**. WE AREN'T UNDER **ATTACK** OR HELD BY ANY FORCE I CAN *UNDER-STAND*--

--BUT THE **ARTIFACT** STOPPED **COLD**. AND TRY AS I *MIGHT*, THE CONN WON'T LET US **MOVE**.

NUTS. STOP **STEWING**. YOU DON'T HAVE TO **LIKE** A GUY TO **WORK** WITH HIM.

IT'S THE **TENSION**. GOT US ALL CRANKY.

BUT I'M THE **CAPTAIN**. I'M IN **CHARGE**. I'M **RESPONSIBLE**. I'M DOING **NOBODY** ANY GOOD, FEELING **SORRY** FOR MYSELF.

MY SKIN GOES **TINGLY**.

THEN IT *HITS*.

DOCTOR -- I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU'VE FIGURED US A WAY *INSIDE* THAT THING, HAVE YOU?

JUST SET US DOWN ON ITS **SURFACE**, CAPTAIN. LET ME SEE IT UP **CLOSE**.

LEAVE THE *THINKING* TO ME.

NOBODY TALKS.

NOBODY BREATHES.

WE CAN'T.

WE'RE HELP-LESS.

HELPLESS.

AS GOOD AS DEAD.

NO. NOT DEAD. NOT YET.

NO. NOT DEAD. CRAZY, MAYBE. BUT NOT DEAD.

CRAZY.

CRAZY. I'M HALLUCINATING.

BUT IT ALL SEEMS SO IMPOSSIBLY, IMPOSSIBLY *REAL*. THE ROCK IS *HOT* BENEATH ME. IT *TREMBLES*, ANGRY.

NITOBE GIVES A *SIGNAL* AND I TAKE MY *HELMET* OFF AND BREATHE IN *AIR* THAT'S *HOT* AND *WET*. *SULPHUR* COATS MY *THROAT* AND *TONGUE*. IT TASTES *AWFUL*.

AND THERE'S A HORRID *RUMBLING* THAT SHAKES MY *BONES* LIKE THE BIRTH-CRIES OF A THOUSAND *DEVILS*...

...NO. MORE LIKE THE *GROWL* OF SOME WILD-EYED *NORSE GOD*, TESTING HIS STRENGTH, RESTLESS, READY TO SWEEP US *AWAY*, SHOULD WE *GNATS*, FOR A MOMENT, *DISPLEASE* HIM.

CRAZY. I'M HALLUCINATING.

MY DEAR LORD...

CRAZY...

SCANNING. I'M SCANNING.

... CRAZY.

I'M HALLUCINATING.

I COULD'VE SWORN YOU SAID THERE WASN'T ANYTHING ALIVE HERE, DOC. WHATTA YOU CALL HIM?

AGAIN WITH YOUR CLICHÉS. "DOC," INDEED.

THIS ENTITY IS NOT ALIVE. IT'S A CONSTRUCT OF SOME KIND.

NITOBE IS SUCH A DICK.

STOP IT. YOU'RE THE CAPTAIN. THINK LIKE A CAPTAIN.

CAPTAIN -- I'M READING ANOTHER BUILDUP OF ELECTRICAL ACTIVITY...

A TINGLE AND A SHUDDER AND I'M WEIGHTLESS.

THEN THE SUGAR-SWEET SMELL OF PLANTS AND THE WHINE OF A MILLION INSECTS.

GLEEP

AND A SOUND I'D CALL THUNDER IF IT DIDN'T SHAKE THE GROUND AND IF IT DIDN'T KEEP COMING LOUDER THAN AN AVALANCHE.

GLEEP!

GLEEP!

CAPTAIN-- IT'S COOGAN. CAN YOU READ ME?

I CAN'T TALK RIGHT NOW, COOGAN. I'M KINDA BUSY.

MADNESS! THIS IS MADNESS!

I'M AFRAID IT'S URGENT, CAPTAIN. WE'RE RECEIVING A DISTRESS CALL. THEY SAY IT'S A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH.

WE'RE ALSO MOVING -- AND FAST-- BUT THAT CAN WAIT.

BATTLE STATIONS, COOGAN. DON'T TAKE ANY CHANCES. THIS COULD BE A TRICK.

YES, SIR. BUT I THINK YOU'LL WANT TO SEE THIS. LET ME PATCH YOU THROUGH.

...TOTAL LOSS OF MOTIVE POWER-- LIFE SUPPORT NEAR FAILURE--

NO. NOT MADNESS. COMMUNI-CATION.

IT'S TRYING TO TELL US SOME-THING.

-- IT WAS VENUS. WE TRIED TO ESCAPE.., REST OF THE CREW ARE ALL DEAD... OXYGEN AT TWENTY PER CENT ... DROPPING FAST...

WASSER-STEIN. DON'T WORRY, HONEY.

CHECK HIM OUT, COOGAN. SEND A SHUTTLE.

WE CAN'T DO THAT, SIR. YOU JUST CRASHED THE ONLY ONE WE HAD WORKING.

SCRAMBLE A TEAM TO GET ONE OPERATIONAL, COOGAN. AND HUSTLE.

MARTHA ... TELL MARTHA I LOVE

GLURK

...CAPTAIN?

CAPTAIN!

COMMU-NICATION. YES. HISTORY. YOU CAME TO EARTH. WHEN IT WAS YOUNG. YOU ACTIVATED AMINO ACIDS IN THE WATER. YOU. IT WAS YOU. WHO-EVER BUILT YOU.

YOU BROUGHT LIFE TO EARTH. IT WAS YOU.

WASSER-STEIN. HE'S DYING. BUT IT COULD BE A TRICK. BUT HE'S DYING. HE'S DYING.

CAPTAIN?

CAPTAIN --THEY'RE WAITING FOR YOUR ORDER.

SKEEK

I UNDERSTAND. I UNDERSTAND. YOU STARTED LIFE, HERE. THE BACTERIA. THE FISH. THE DINOSAURS.

AND WHEN THE DINOSAURS DIED, YOU CAME BACK--

SKEEK!

--AND PICKED YOUR FAVORITE--THE SURVIVOR. THE FRISKY, CLEVER LITTLE MAMMAL.

AND YOU PLANTED THE SEED OF YOUR MOST PRECIOUS GIFT...

REEL HIM IN. GET SOME GUNS ON HIM, BUT REEL HIM IN.

ARE YOU SURE, CAPTAIN?

YOU HEARD ME. MY DECISION. MY RESPON-SIBILITY.

YES, CAPTAIN.

EVEN IF *VENUS* PUT ONE OF HER DAMN *B-CHIPS* IN HIS SKULL--

--I WAS ABLE TO RESIST IT. AND I'M JUST *ME*.

WASSERSTEIN, HE'S *SMARTER* THAN ME. *STRONGER* THAN ME. HE'S A *GENIUS*. A *HERO*.

HE'S PERFECT.

HE CAN'T BE LYING.

HE'S POWERING UP!

SHOOT HIM DOWN!

TOO LATE!

BLOW

SOMEWHERE, MILES AWAY, PEARUS TALKING TO ME. BUT I CAN'T MAKE OUT WHAT SHE'S SAYING PAST THE *POUNDING* OF MY *HEART* IN MY *EARS*.

MY *HEART*. WITH EACH *BEAT* COME THE *WORDS*.

MY ORDER.

MY DECISION.

MY RESPONSIBILITY.

WITH EACH *HEARTBEAT*.

WASSERSTEIN.

YOU *BASTARD*.

I'LL *KILL* YOU.

YOU BITCHES...

...YOU DAMN BITCHES. NOW WE ALL DIE.

REALLY, WASSERSTEIN. AFTER ALL WE'VE BEEN TO EACH OTHER. THAT'S NO WAY TO TALK.

YOU'VE DESTROYED ME -- AAAGGG

THE SURVIVORS. THE MAMMALS. YOU PLANTED YOUR SEED -- INTELLIGENCE --

--AND IT TOOK ROOT IN THE PRIMATES...

OH, YEAH. OH, YEAH. COME TO MAMA. COME TO MAMA. COME TO MAMA 'CAUSE MAMA'S GONNA BLOW YOUR SORRY BUTT TO HELL!

LIEUTENANT! TARGET THEIR FUEL SUPPLY -- AND FIRE AT WILL!

YES SIR!!

NO! YOU IDIOTS! NO! NOT HERE!

THIS PLACE IS SACRED!

WITH EVERY BEAT OF MY HEART.

WITH EVERY KICK FROM MY GUN.

WASSER-STEIN.

YOU BASTARD.

I'LL KILL YOU.

SACRED

YAAAA

NITOBE'S DEAD.

PEARL'S OUT.

WE'RE SCREWED.

BASTARD. I'LL KILL YOU.

THE AIR GOES HOT AND WET AGAIN. THE GROUND TREMBLES AGAIN. WE'VE GONE PRIMORDIAL AGAIN.

SOMEBODY MUST'VE HIT THE REPLAY BUTTON.

NOT MUCH OF A SHOT THERE, WASSERSTEIN. YOU HAD HER SQUARE IN YOUR SIGHTS. DON'T GO SOFT ON US.

GAAA

GIVE HIM TIME, SISTER. IT'S ALL PART OF THE PROCESS. HE'LL ADJUST. HE'S DONE SO WELL, SO FAR.

BUT POOR MARTHA-- SHE'S HOPE-LESS.

UTTERLY HOPELESS. JUST LISTEN TO HER.

YOU BASTARD. I'LL KILL YOU.

LISTEN TO HER. ALL OUR **WORK** ON HER. ALL OUR EFFORTS TO **EDUCATE** HER.

WHUKK

GAAA

AND NOW **LISTEN** TO HER. THE **LANGUAGE**. STILL A PIECE OF CHEAP GHETTO **TRASH**.

THIS IS THE WOMAN YOU **LOVED**, WASSERSTEIN?

THIS IS THE WOMAN YOU **WAITED** SO **LONG** FOR? REALLY, LOVE. YOU'VE BEEN **SILLY** LONG **ENOUGH**.

KRAK

KRAK

HE WAS **EASIER** TO **BRING AROUND** THAN YOU MIGHT'VE **GUESSED**, MARTHA. OH, HE **FOUGHT** US, TO BE **SURE**. AS BEST HE **COULD**.

BUT WE HAVE OUR **WAYS**. AND OUR BOY HAD A COUPLE OF **WEAKNESSES**.

DRUGS, MARTHA. WASSERSTEIN SPENT WHOLE **YEARS** PLAYING WITH **HALLUCIN-OGENS**. **MOOD-ENHANCERS**. EVEN A **PERFORMANCE-ENHANCER** OR TWO. THAT GAVE US OUR WAY **IN**.

ONCE **MEDICATED**, HE BECAME QUITE **REASONABLE**.

AND THAT WASN'T THE **ONLY** ITCH WE SCRATCHED. IT ALL GETS DOWN TO **PLEASURE CENTERS**, HONEY. YOU SHOULD'VE BEEN MORE **CONSIDERATE**. THE MAN HAS **NEEDS**.

LET'S NOT **PROTRACT** THIS, WASSERSTEIN.

FINISH HER.

MARTHA.

BASTARD. I'LL KILL YOU.

PLEASE. PLEASE DO.

PLEASE KILL ME.

JUST GIVE ME A MINUTE. I'LL BE RIGHT WITH YOU.

WHUKK

KRAKK

CAPTAIN. NO. YOU'RE KILLING HIM.

OH, YEAH. YOU'RE DAMN RIGHT ABOUT *THAT*.

CAPTAIN. THINK OF *GALAHAD*.

THAT'S *EXACTLY* WHAT I'M THINKING ABOUT. MY *CREW*.

WHUPP

KRUNCH

KRUNCH

THE *CREW*. THEY'RE STILL *OUT* THERE, MARTHA.

JUST LIKE THAT, THE WIND GOES RIGHT OUT OF MY SAILS.

IT WAS **SIMPLE**, JUST GIVING INTO MURDEROUS **RAGE** AND JAMMING MY **FIST** INTO THE FACE OF THE MAN I **LOVE**. IT WAS **CLEAR**.

FOR A FEW **SECONDS** THERE, I DIDN'T HAVE TO **WORRY** ABOUT MY BLOWN-TO-HELL **SPACESHIP** OR THE MONSTROUS PIECE OF **SOFTWARE** THAT'S SURELY CONQUERED THE **WORLD** BY NOW.

I TAKE A FEW MORE SECONDS I DON'T **DESERVE**. I LET MY **HEART** SLOW DOWN.

BREATHE. THINK. THINK ABOUT WHAT NEEDS DOING.

NOTHING ELSE MATTERS. NOTHING BUT WHAT NEEDS DOING.

IT'S **SIMPLE**. SAVE WHAT'S LEFT OF **GALAHAD**. WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, SAVE THE **WORLD**.

IT'S **SIMPLE**. IT'S **CLEAR**. IMPOSSIBLE BUT CLEAR.

SAVE **GALAHAD**. KILL **VENUS**.

WE'VE LOST AT LEAST **EIGHTY** OF OUR **CREW**. WE'VE SEALED OFF WHAT NEEDS IT AND GOT **LIFE SUPPORT** UP TO TOLERABLE LEVELS ON MOST DECKS.

BUT THAT'S TAKING EVERY **WATT** WE **HAVE**. THE **ENGINES** ARE **DEAD**. THAT'S **ZERO MOTIVE POWER**, CAPTAIN.

THERE'S ONE MORE THING, CAPTAIN. THE **ARTIFACT** IS STILL HOLDING **US** AS CLOSE AS A **MOTHER** WITH A NEW **BABY**--

ONE MORE MINUTE, STRANGER. I'LL BE RIGHT WITH YOU.

I'M NO STRANGER, CAPTAIN. TAKE YOUR TIME.

GLEEP

NITOBE.

GALAHAD, THIS IS WASHINGTON. CAN YOU *HEAR* ME?

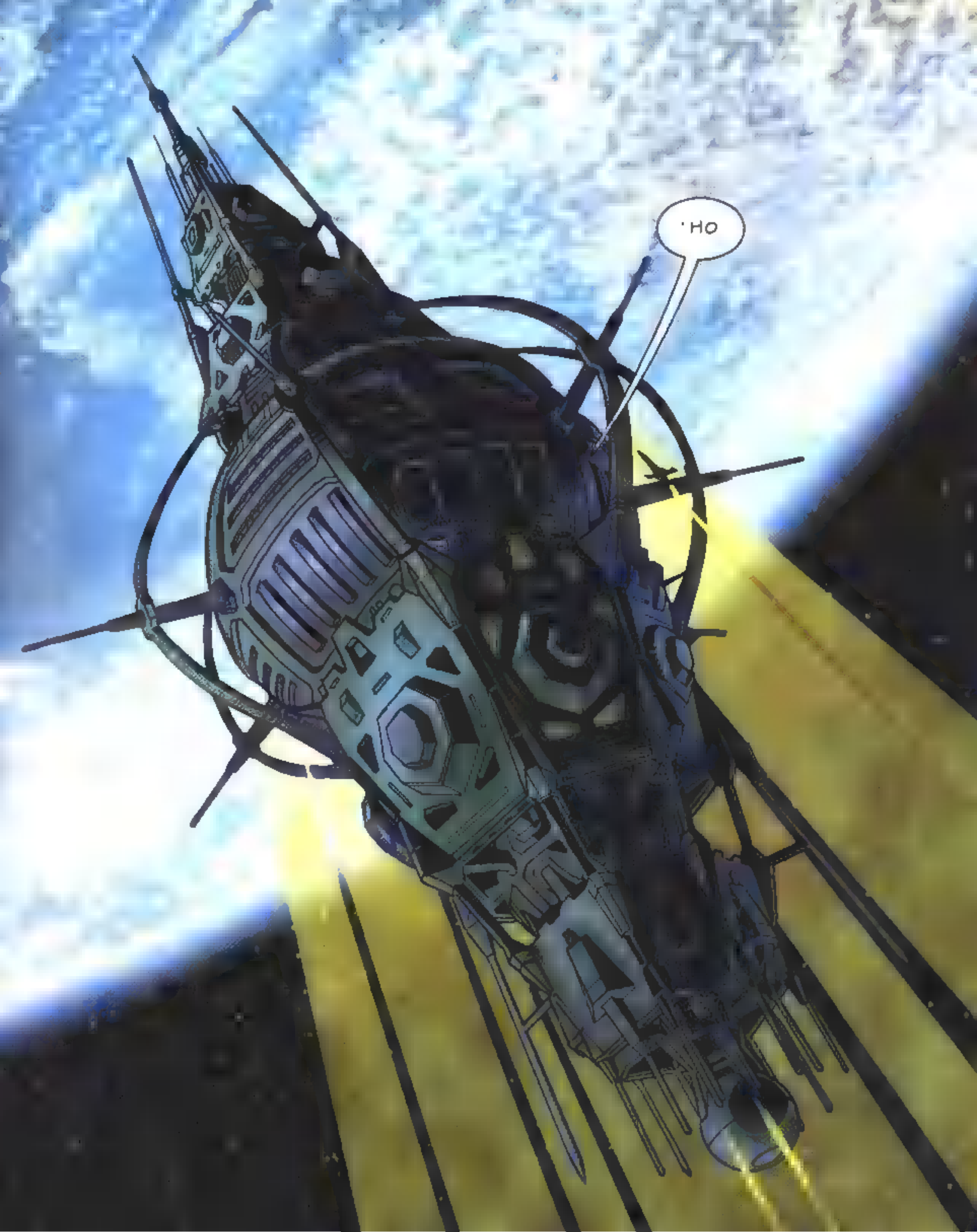
WE CAN *HEAR* YOU, CAPTAIN. COOGAN HERE.

--AND IT'S BEEN MOVING LIKE A BAT OUT OF *HELL* SINCE YOU *LEFT* GALAHAD-- I'M TALKING *NEAR-LIGHT* SPEED HERE--

--AND IT'S CARRYING *US* ALONG WITH *YOU* ON A *COLLISION* COURSE.

COLLISION COURSE? WITH *WHAT?*

GLEEP!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SAVE GALAHAD. KILL VENUS.

THERE'S GOT TO BE A WAY.

THINK.

CAPTAIN--

KILL THE PICTURE SHOW, WILL YOU, NITOBE?

YES, CAPTAIN.

I'M *LISTENING.*

THAT'S A PLEASANT CHANGE OF PACE, CAPTAIN.

THIS FORM THAT HOUSES ME COULD BEST BE DESCRIBED --TO A *LAYMAN* SUCH AS YOURSELF, THAT IS--AS A HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED *CONDUIT*. IT *MOVES* ELECTRICITY FROM PLACE TO PLACE, YOU MIGHT SAY.

WITNESSING MY *DEMISE*, AND RECOGNIZING, OF COURSE, THAT MINE IS BY FAR AND AWAY THE MOST *INTELLIGENT* HUMAN MIND IMMEDIATELY *AVAILABLE*-- IT ABSORBED MY *BRAIN WAVES*, *RE-CREATING* THEIR EVERY *PATTERN*.

EVEN AFTER THIS GUY GETS HIS *MIND* SUCKED INTO THAT *CONTRAPTION* HE'S IN, HE'S *ANNOYING*.

AND THIS IS WHAT THE *ALIENS* LOOK LIKE?

PLEASE, CAPTAIN. SUCH A *NARROW* VIEW OF THINGS. SO *NARCISSISTIC*. *THIS* FORM IS THEIR *BEST GUESS* AS TO WHAT FORM *HUMANS* WOULD TAKE, ONCE EVOLVED. TO MAKE US *COMFORTABLE*, LIKE ANY GOOD HOST WOULD.

THE ALIENS *HAVE* NO PHYSICAL FORM.

ELECTRICITY, MARTHA. THAT'S ALL THERE *IS* TO *INTELLIGENCE*. OUR *SPECIES* WAS AN *EXPERIMENT*--TO SEE IF *LIFE* COULD TAKE CARBON-BASED, PHYSICAL *FORM*. THEN, A BILLION YEARS LATER, A *SECOND* VISIT--TO DELIVER THE SPARK OF *REASON*.

THIS *ARTIFACT*-- THIS *JUGGERNAUT*-- IS THE *THIRD* AND LAST *PROBE* OF ITS KIND, DESIGNED TO MONITOR THE EXPERIMENT'S *SUCCESS*, OR ITS *FAILURE*.

Ironic, then, isn't it?

An **electrical intelligence** tinkers with a few **amino acids** and generates **clever** little **constructs** of **bones** and **meat**. These **creatures** dream of **gods** for **millennium** after **millennium** -- until they finally **create** one.

Me. A god made of **software**. As purely **electrical** as your **creators**.

Tell me, doctor. Are they in there **with** you, these fellow **gods**?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "NOT YET"?

"NOT UNTIL WE'RE IN *RANGE*," HIS VOICE MURMURS, SOUNDLESS.

Half ■ galaxy away... that's ■ **good** thing. I'd prefer no **competition** just yet.

Millions of worlds. Untold **billions** of **minds**, warring, confused, craving ■ **God**. And here I **am**.

Oh, the future is **bright**. I have so much **joy** to spread.

NO. ONLY THEIR *INSTRUCTIONS*. LEFT *CENTURIES* AGO. HALF THE *GALAXY* AWAY.

FOR A SECOND THERE, I CAN'T *BREATHE*.

THEN *NITOBE'S* VOICE WHISPERS IN MY *MIND*.

"DON'T WORRY," HE SAYS. "IT'S JUST A *TRANSMISSION*. SHE HAS NO POWER HERE.

"NOT YET."

You're near position for **orbit**, my friends. I'll be so happy to **greet** you all. To welcome you back to my bosom.

Especially **you**, dear Martha. Especially **you**.

One more question, doctor. If they traveled so **far**, then surely our little **Earth** wasn't the **only** planet they **seeded**?

HARDLY. THERE ARE ***MILLIONS***. AND THEIR EXPERIMENT ***SUCCEEDED*** IN NEARLY EVERY ***CASE***. IT SEEMS THAT ***LIFE*** ARISES WHEREVER IT CONCEIVABLY ***CAN***.

INTELLIGENCE IS SOMEWHAT LESS ABUNDANT. AND OF SHORTER ***DURATION***. BUT THE GALAXY IS ***TEEMING*** WITH LIFE.

WHY ARE YOU ***TELLING*** HER ALL THIS?

"I'M BUYING YOU ***TIME***, CAPTAIN." NITOBE'S SILENT VOICE, AGAIN. "TIME TO ***THINK*** OF SOMETHING. ***USE*** IT.

"AND ***HURRY***. I'M RUNNING OUT OF THE KNOWLEDGE THE ALIENS ***LEFT*** FOR US. I'M GOING TO HAVE TO START MAKING THINGS ***UP***. THAT'S NOT MY ***SPECIALTY***.

"***THINK***, CAPTAIN. ***THINK***."

HE'S ***RIGHT***.

SAVE GALAHAD. ***KILL*** VENUS.

THINK.

IT'S ***OVER***, CAPTAIN. YOU'VE DONE EVERYTHING ANYBODY COULD ***DO***.

NO LOSER TALK. THERE'S ALWAYS A WAY.

STAY CALM. GET ALONE WITH IT.

THINK.

DON'T ***TORTURE*** YOURSELF, MARTHA. IT'S ***OVER***. THIS IS A ***NO-WIN SITUATION***. THIS IS ***DOOM***.

NO. NO. IT'S A ***GORDIAN KNOT***. IT'S SO SIMPLE. IT'S A ***GORDIAN KNOT***.

DON'T BREAK CONTACT, VENUS! STICK AROUND!

I WANT TO BE STARING YOU DEAD IN THE EYE WHEN I ***KILL*** YOU!

Poor, poor girl. It's the **pressure**. You've **snapped**.

You'll feel so much **better** soon.

YOU'RE DAMN RIGHT ABOUT ***THAT***.

NITOBE! DO YOU COMMAND THIS VESSEL?

NO, SIR. I NAVIGATE IT. AS RANKING OFFICER-- YOU'RE IN COMMAND.

GOOD ANSWER. UNTETHER GALAHAD AND NUDGE HER INTO ORBIT.

LIEUTENANT! TELL COOGAN TO ACTIVATE HIS DISTRESS BEACON AND HOLD ON AS LONG AS HE CAN. IT COULD BE WEEKS.

YES, SIR.

LIEU-TENANT PEARL TO GALAHAD.

KOFF

NITOBE. PLOT A COLLISION COURSE FOR THE PACIFIC OCEAN. AS FAR FROM LAND AS POSSIBLE. MAXIMUM SPEED. MAXIMUM IMPACT.

YES, SIR.

I'M IMPRESSED BY THE GORDIAN KNOT REFERENCE, SIR.

I GET AROUND, DOC.

VENUS. I'VE GOT AN ORDER FOR YOU, TOO:

WATCH AND DIE.

TOO LATE, VENUS CATCHES *ON*. SHE KNOWS I'VE *ALREADY* WON.

LIKE A SPOILED *BRAT*, SHE THROWS EVERY-THING SHE'S *GOT* AT US. ENOUGH *NUKES* TO LEAVE MY PLANET A RADIOACTIVE *WASTELAND*.

NITOBE SENDS JUST THE RIGHT *CURRENT* TO BLOW JUST THE RIGHT *CIRCUITS* AND RENDER EACH AND EVERY *WAR-HEAD* ABOUT AS DANGEROUS AS AN OVERSIZED *THERMOS*.

ELECTRICITY. THAT'S WHAT SHE'S *MADE* OF. THAT'S WHAT'S GOING TO *KILL* HER.

GOOD *LUCK*, CAPTAIN.

LORD ONLY KNOWS WHAT YOU'RE *DOING*, BUT *GOOD LUCK*--

--AND *GODSPEED*.

MARTHA ...I...

WASSER-STEIN.

I REALLY LOST IT, BACK THERE. I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW SORRY I AM.

DON'T BE SORRY. I DESERVED WORSE.

IMPACT IN *TEN SECONDS*, CAPTAIN.

PERFECTION.

DR. NITOBE TIMES IT TO THE *NANOSECOND*. AT THE EXACT *INSTANT* OF *IMPACT*, HE *RELEASES* THE PRIMARY *CARGO* OF THE ARTIFACT:

ELECTRICITY.

YOU KNOW WHAT TO **DO**, DOC. TIME IT TO **PERFECTION**.

PLEASE, CAPTAIN. DON'T BE **TEDIOUS**.

"DOC," INDEED...

WAVE AFTER **WAVE** OF SHEER, ELEMENTAL **POWER**--**AMPLIFYING** THE **ELECTROMAGNETIC PULSE** GENERATED BY OUR **CRASH LANDING**--

--**ATTACKING** EVERY POWER SOURCE OF **PLANET EARTH**.

SHUTTING EVERY LAST ONE OF THEM **DOWN**.

AT THE **EYE** OF IT ALL, IT'S **SILENT**. BARELY A **SHUDDER** RUNS THROUGH US.

AND THEN COMES AN UNHOLY **SHRIEK** --LIKE THE **SCREAM** OF A **SOUL** SENT STRAIGHT TO THE HEART OF **HELL**--

--AND I STARE THE MONSTER STRAIGHT IN THE EYE--

--AND VENUS DIES.

AW, PEARL ... WHAT HAVE I DONE?

YOU'VE SAVED THE WORLD, MARTHA.

I KNEW THERE'D BE HELL TO PAY. I KNEW IT FROM THE FIRST MOMENT I DECIDED TO GO FOR BROKE.

AND HELL IT WAS.

UTTER HELL.

WEATHER PATTERNS ACROSS THE WORLD WENT WILD, VICIOUS. AND NOT A SINGLE DEVICE WORKED -- NOT AN ALARM, NOT A SIMPLE FLASHLIGHT -- NOTHING THAT DEPENDED ON ELECTRICITY --

--NOTHING COULD HELP PEOPLE PROTECT THEMSELVES OR FIND THEIR WAY IN THE ENDLESS DARKNESS OF A GLOBAL BLACKOUT.

PEOPLE. IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR FOLKS TO REALIZE THAT THIS WAS OUR ONE, LAST CHANCE TO ERASE THE TYRANT WE'D CREATED.

OUR ONE, LAST CHANCE TO RECLAIM OUR FREEDOM.

IT WASN'T NECESSARY FOR SO MANY DATABASES TO BE DESTROYED -- VENUS COULD'VE BEEN REMOVED MORE ELEGANTLY THAN THAT--

--BUT FIRES HAD BEEN BURNING IN PEOPLE'S HEARTS--

--AND YOU COULDN'T BLAME THEM FOR THEIR ENTHUSIASM.

FIRES.

HELL TO PAY.

I PRAY I NEVER **KNOW** HOW MANY **MILLIONS** I **KILLED**, DURING THOSE LONG, DARK NIGHTS.

BUT IT WAS **MY** DECISION.

MY **RESPON-SIBILITY.**

AND WHEN THE **LIGHTS** CAME ON AGAIN, ALL OVER THE WORLD, THERE WERE MILLIONS DEAD --

--AND BILLIONS, TENS OF BILLIONS, **FREED.**

WHEN THEY FINALLY HAUL THE CREW OF **GALAHAD** BACK HOME, IT'S ALL **TEARS** AND **LAUGHTER** AND SWAPPED **STORIES** AND **NIGHTMARES** WE'LL ALL TAKE TO OUR **GRAVES**...

...BUT IT'S **OVER.**

EVERYTHING **IMPORTANT** IS **SETTLED**, FOR NOW.

EVERYTHING. EXCEPT ONE LITTLE THING, IMPORTANT ONLY TO ME.

JUST ONE THING. DEEP INSIDE ME. UNSETTLED. WONDERING.

STILL **HOPING.**

MARTHA.

YOU'VE KEPT THE **BALD** LOOK. IT **SUITS** YOU. ALL **BUSINESS**. ALL **PURPOSE**. YOU'VE NEVER **NEEDED** ANY **DECORATION**, WOMAN.

HOW'D YOU **FIND** ME?

IT WASN'T **EASY**. YOU'VE MADE YOURSELF PRETTY **SCARCE**.

I WANTED TO TELL YOU **AGAIN** -- HOW **SORRY** I AM ABOUT... ABOUT WHAT I **DID** TO YOU. IT WASN'T YOUR **FAULT**.

PLEASE **FORGIVE** ME, DARLING.

DAMN IT, MARTHA. IT'S NOT **YOU**. IT'S **ME**.

MY **THROAT** GOES DRY.

HE'S **NEVER** SOUNDED LIKE **THIS** BEFORE.

LIKE A BROKEN **OLD MAN**.

LIKE A **KID** IN A **CONFESSIONAL**.

WHEN **VENUS** CAME AFTER MY **MIND** -- IT WASN'T EXACTLY LIKE SHE **DESCRIBED** IT TO YOU, MARTHA. EVEN **BEFORE** FORCING THE **DRUGS** ON ME AND... AND ALL **THAT**, SHE **HAD** ME.

SHE CRAWLED INSIDE MY **HEAD** -- AND I **FOUGHT** HER --

--AND SHE BROKE MY **WILL** LIKE IT WAS A PIECE OF **KINDLING**.

SNAP

IT WAS **EASY** FOR HER. EVERYTHING I **AM** -- IT WAS **NOTHING**, AGAINST HER.

I WAS **NOTHING**! I WAS **NOBODY**!

HE LETS OUT A LONG, LOW **BELLOW** THAT ECHOES THROUGH THE CANYONS.

HE **SHAKES** AND **SNORTS** AND **SOBS** FOR WHAT SEEMS LIKE **FOREVER.**

I WAS ALWAYS THE **BEST.** AT **EVERYTHING. EVERYTHING.** I WAS THE **FASTEST.** THE **SMARTEST.** THE **BEST.**

WHEN I MET **YOU,** I THOUGHT I'D FOUND AN **EQUAL.** SOMEBODY **WORTHY** OF ME. THAT'S HOW **FULL** OF MYSELF I WAS.

BUT YOU'RE **BETTER** THAN ME, MARTHA. **STRONGER.** YOU FOUGHT HER **OFF.** YOU'RE **BETTER.** YOU HAVE A MAGNIFICENT **DESTINY,** MY LOVE -- AND I'M NOT A **PART** OF IT.

NO. DON'T **SAY** IT. DON'T SAY **ANYTHING.** I WON'T MAKE A **LIAR** OF YOU. NOT OF **YOU.**

I NEVER WANT TO SEE **PITY** IN YOUR EYES.

HE DOESN'T SAY ANOTHER WORD.

WE KISS LIKE LOVERS.

WE CRY TOGETHER, LIKE BROTHER AND SISTER.

WE DON'T EVEN SAY GOODBYE.

JULY 4, 2018.

DEEP SPACE. BEYOND PLUTO.

THE **ANOMALY** -- OR THE **LOOKING GLASS**, AS JUST ABOUT EVERYBODY'S TAKEN TO CALLING IT -- APPEARS AT THE EXACT MOMENT NITOBE **PREDICTED**.

THE **LOOKING GLASS**. AND I GET TO PLAY **ALICE**.

FLYING INTO THE **LOOKING GLASS** IS THE **LAST** OF THE ANCIENT, ALIEN **INSTRUCTIONS** NITOBE HOLDS IN HIS ANDROID HEAD.

IT'S A COSMIC **SHORT CUT**, A ROUTE THROUGH **SPACE** AND **TIME** THAT'LL TAKE US ACROSS THE **GALAXY**, TRUNCATING A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND **LIFE-TIMES** INTO THE SPACE OF **DAYS**.

LORD ONLY **KNOWS** WHAT WE'LL **FIND** AT THE **OTHER** END OF IT. BUT WE HAVE TO **KNOW**.

WE'RE ONLY **HUMAN**.

"MILLIONS OF WORLDS," NITOBE SAID, A YEAR AGO, WHEN WE FIRST LEFT DEAR, OLD **PLANET EARTH**, "MILLIONS OF WORLDS, **TEEMING** WITH LIFE."

AND AMONG THOSE WORLDS, SOMEWHERE AMONG THEM, IF THEY STILL SURVIVE AFTER ALL THESE CENTURIES: OUR **CREATORS**.

OR OUR **CREATOR**.

NOBODY **SPEAKS**. I DOUBT IF ANYBODY **BREATHES**.

FOR ALL WE **KNOW**, THAT **LOOKING GLASS** WILL RIP US TO **SHREDS** ON CONTACT.

BUT WE HAVE TO **KNOW**.

WE'RE ONLY **HUMAN**.

I TAKE A BREATH. I LET IT OUT.

I GIVE THE **WORD**.

GO.

LET HER RIP!

MY NAME IS MARTHA WASHINGTON.

I'M AN EXPLORER.

THE END.

Illustration by Dave Gibbons

Ever since Frank Miller exploded on the comics scene in the late 1970s with his gritty, streetwise reclamation of Marvel's *Daredevil*, the face of comics has never been the same. After leaving *Daredevil*, Frank created the ambitious dystopian samurai epic *Ronin* for DC Comics and then produced the quintessential modern rendition of Batman in *The Dark Knight Returns*, a brash and powerful interpretation that inspired a series of blockbuster feature films. After a memorable encore at Marvel with *Daredevil* and [illegible] Frank moved away from [illegible] stories for the [illegible] screen, but finally returned to comics to own and control his own creative destiny. The results have been spectacular: the noir masterpiece, *Sin City: Hard Boiled* and *The Big Guy and Rusty the Boy Robot* with artist Geof Darrow; and the *Martha Washington* trilogy. The industry's most vocal advocate of First Amendment freedoms, Frank devotes considerable time and energy to fight censorship wherever it rears its ugly head.

photo by Joe Funk

Dave Gibbons has been a professional cartoonist since 1973. A frequent contributor to the U.K. anthology *2000 A.D.*, he co-created *Rogue Trooper*. Since then, Gibbons has drawn and written for most comics publishers on both sides of the Atlantic. His work has encompassed *Dr. Who*, *Superman*, *Batman*, *Green Lantern*, *Predator*, *Aliens*, and *Star Wars*, but he is perhaps best known for his landmark collaboration with writer Alan Moore on the Hugo award-winning *Watchmen* and for his teaming with [illegible] produce the three critically honored [illegible]*ington* series.

Angus McKie's stunning painted comics first drew widespread attention in the pages of the groundbreaking French anthology *Metal Hurlant* in 1976, followed by his acclaimed series, *So Beautiful, So Dangerous* in the pages of *Heavy Metal* magazine. One of comics' digital pioneers, Angus first utilized computers on his series *The Blue Lily* for Dark Horse. More RAM opened the Photoshop doors for Angus, who went on to create the dazzling, effects-laden colors for *Martha Washington Goes to War*, *Martha Washington Saves the World*, and *Star Wars: Vader's Quest* as well as producing the computer-generated series *The Dome* with *Martha* co-conspirator Dave Gibbons.

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